



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Christine Brammer
808-397-2651, ext. 252

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 24, 2010

NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and Office of Law Enforcement Announce Statewide Whale Safety Workshops

NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and Office of Law Enforcement are hosting statewide boater workshops to help vessel operators stay safe and operate within the law during humpback whale season.

The public workshops, which continue through November 29, will review guidelines, tips, and regulations concerning how close vessels can come to whales, and safe and legal whale watching. New information and recent research also will be discussed. For the complete schedule of workshops please visit the sanctuary online at <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

"Collisions with vessels are a major source of injury and death for endangered whales in Hawaii," said Allen Tom, Pacific Islands regional director for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. "It's important for boaters to be extra vigilant during whale season, for their own safety and the protection of these magnificent animals."

As many as 12,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters each year. These acrobatic, 45-ton marine mammals attract wildlife enthusiasts, but collisions between vessels and whales pose a serious injury threat both to the animals and boaters. Ocean users also are subject to risks when whales surface, breach, or slap their massive tails or flippers.

Humpback whale season in Hawaii generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. The usual peak in humpback abundance occurs from January through March.

Endangered humpback whales are protected in Hawaii. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when in the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other federal marine mammal and endangered species protection regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, and paddle boarders, throughout the Hawaiian Islands. In the past two seasons, NOAA has issued notices of violations proposing civil administrative penalties against commercial whale watch operators, recreational boaters, kayakers, stand-up paddle boarders and swimmers for allegedly violating the approach rules. It is important that all ocean users be aware of and comply with the prohibition against approaching endangered Humpback whales.

Humpback whales congregate in ocean waters less than 600 feet deep throughout the main Hawaiian Islands. Mariners may also encounter humpback whales at the surface over deeper waters, however. Ocean users are urged to take caution during the humpback whale season by keeping a sharp lookout, traveling at a slow, safe speed and always staying at the vessel's helm.

Hawaiian Island Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is administered jointly by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources. The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/usnoaagov>.